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Adult Education as a Tool for Nurturing Nigeria's Nascent Democracy

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to establish how adult education can be used as a tool for nurturing Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper highlights on the concepts of adult, adult education, characteristics of an adult, and democracy. It illustrated the role which adult education could play in minimizing the challenges which pose danger to Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper made some recommendations and concluded that adult education is imperative to achieve a sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Introduction

Education generally, is the backbone of any national development. It is a parameter upon which individuals and national development could be measured. It is also a reliable source of human empowerment for the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Education is an instrument for human and national development.

Adult education as an integral part of education, refers to a learning process whether formal, informal or non-formal which the adult engages in for better development. It emphasizes all forms of functional education programmes for youths and adults outside the formal school system. Such education programmes include basic literacy programme, post literacy programme, continuing education programme, vocational education programme, (FRN Blue Print 2008). These adult educational programmes are geared towards human development which in turn leads to national development. Nzeneri (2010) states that adult education in its ramifications, embraces all forms of formal adult education, non-formal adult education and informal adult education.

Formal Adult Education: Simply means any consciously planned and systematically organized educational programme which adults engage themselves in. Here, the adults register themselves, and follow specified syllabuses or courses on full-time or part time basis. This form of adult education takes place within the formal school setting.

Non-Formal Adult Education: This is just the opposite of the formal adult education. This form of adult education takes place outside the formal school setting. Sometimes this form of adult education is being referred to as "out-of-school adult education".

Bhola (1979) observes that non-formal adult education covers all out-of-school education programmes like agricultural extension and cooperative education, political, community development and environmental education.

Eheazu (1998) and Nzeneri (2010) indicate that:

non-formal adult education covers training and instruction outside the formal school system and ranges from individualized apprenticeship to nationwide literacy. It may be vocational as provided in the craft training centres in Nigeria, designed to provide employment opportunities for young school leavers and for other unemployed persons or the girls vocational centres established in many African countries skills and prepare young women for marriage and business.

Non-formal adult education apart from the above, also involves social and political education like leadership and citizenship education, political education for political awareness etc.

Informal Adult Education: This simply means incidental, accidental or unintentional learning gained from day-to-day life experiences by the adults as they encounter changes and challenges in their lives. Nzeneri (2010) states that informal adult education is gained through listening music, conversations and media houses like radio broadcasting, newspapers, magazines, televisions etc.

Characteristics of an Adult

Ugwu (2011) outlined the following as major characteristics inherent in any adult.

- ❖ Adults have accumulated knowledge and wealth of experiences in diverse areas.
- ❖ Adults are mature people made of physical, psychological, social, moral, economic, political, cultural and civic potentials that make them thrive well in the society.
- ❖ Adults are relevant oriented because they are always eager to know reason(s) behind what ever they want to do.

The above characteristics obtains in any nation in the world, be it in Europe, Asia, America or Africa. Adults are the working class in any nation. They are purely involved in democracy. In a democracy, the people participate in making decisions that affect the entire social order. It is imperative that every member of the state know enough about the government; economics, international affairs and other aspects of the social order to be able to participate intelligently.

The post-independent Nigeria was anchored on democratic ideals consequent upon the unconditional surrender of political independence to Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister and Head of Cabinet on the 1st of October, 1960 by Her Majesty, the Queen of England. The euphoria generated by Nigeria's sovereignty was cut short on the 16th of January, 1966 by a bloody coup d'état staged by four majors of the Nigerian army with major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu as the arrowhead. The unfortunate coup d'état claimed the lives of prominent politicians including that of the Prime Minister for alleged corrupt practices.

The 1966 coup also ushered into the Nigerian political history, a litany of bloody and palace coups which prompted the military to intrude into partisan politics in Nigeria. Military incursion into governance is regarded in democratic parlance as an "aberration".

Nigeria experienced a breath of fresh democratic air in 1979 following the election of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as first executive president. Unfortunately, Shagari's administration crumbled on the 31st December, 1983 due to a palace coup which threw up General Mohammed Buhari as military head of state. Another civilian, Chief Ernest Shonekan had a stint as head of an interim national government when the self-acclaimed "evil genius", general Ibrahim Babangida, who wrestled power from General Mohammadu Buhari, "stepped aside" on the 27th of August 1993 in very controversial circumstances generated by the unfair annulment of the June 12 presidential election of 1993 allegedly won by Late politician and business mogul, Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

Shonekan was booted out of the office shortly on the 16th November 1993 by the 'dark goggled' General Sanni Abacha. Abacha died in office in June 1998 paving way for General Abdul Salami Abubakar to become the Head of State. The spate of military dictatorship intensified Nigeria's search for democratic governance. On the 29th of May 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn-in as President and commander-in-chief of the Nigerian Armed forces in what many political analysts regarded as "second missionary journey". The emergence of a democratic Nigeria in May 1999, ended 16 years of consecutive military rule. Today, Nigeria has somehow achieved democratic stability having achieved civilian to civilian transition in 2003, 2007 and 2011.

With an estimated population of about one hundred and fifty (150) million, Nigeria is regarded as the most populous country in Africa with an outrageous rate of illiteracy. The illiteracy rate for Nigerians 15 years and older is about 66% (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2004). This alarming rate of illiteracy stems from government's lackadaisical attitude to adult education. Many adult education and literacy programmes embarked upon by government have been truncated mainly by dismal funding. Adult education programmes continue to operate mainly as disparate, piecemeal activities that are not integrated into a coherent purposeful strategy in pursuit of a relatively development vision (Nnazor, 2005). It may be pertinent at this time to attempt a definition of the concepts adult, adult education and democracy.

Jegede (2003) defines an adult as a person that has attained a specific chronological age of adulthood in a particular society and who can be regarded as mature and experienced individual with the possibility of a certain level of ageing. Those who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong engage in the political process either as electorates or mandate seekers.

UNESCO (1976) in Nzeneri (2010) defines an adult as a person regarded as such by the society to which he/she belongs. From this recommendation of UNESCO, we may now see the definition of who an adult is as culture referenced. It depends on what a particular society considers to be an adult for themselves.

Adult Education: Adult education has variously been described as coat of many colours” (Barikor 2005) in Onyenemezu (2008) owing to its versatility. However, some authorities have at different fora and media defined the discipline based on their experiences and perception. The organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003:4) states that: “adult education encompasses all education and training activities undertaken by adults for professional or personal reasons. It includes general, vocational and enterprise-based, training within a life long perspective.

Hornby (1994) defines democracy as a government that allows freedom of speech, religion and political opinion, that upholds the rule of law and majority rule that respects the right of minorities.

Azikiwe (1961) conceives democracy in its contemporary context as:

A government which is responsible to an electorate, whose representatives are elected on an adult suffrage through a secret ballot. Such government exercises its powers in accordance with certain fundamental rights under a regime which practices the rule of law and respects human dignity on the basis of individual freedom...in a democracy, a characteristic of political tension is the struggle for power. It usually takes shape as a series of battles between the OUTS and the INS for the control of the machineries of government and the organ of the state.

The right to elect or be elected is greatly enhanced by a political system known as democracy.

Oyovbaire (1987:3) perceives democracy as: a political framework from which public policies merge and are administered for society. Former American president, Abraham Lincoln, reputed for putting a stop to the inhuman slave trade gave the most acceptable definition of democracy as government of the people, by the people and for the people (Raphael 1970).

Democracy in this context is people centred. Enemu (1999) traced the origin of democracy to the ancient Greek. According to him, Democracy is a coinage of two Greek words: “Demos” which means “the people” and “kratein” which means “rule of” or “rule by”. A combination of the two phrases literally expresses democracy as “rule by the people”. The Greek are said to be the earliest practitioners of modern democracy which is believed to represent the collective aspirations of the citizenry.

Okowa (1991) states that:

a democratically constituted state can be said to represent the will of the majority. Such a state obviously would have to play a key role in the development of any given modern nation state. It is the state that defines the objectives of the nation.

Olugbemi (1996) sees democracy as “a road map and an ideal”. The Guardian Newspaper editorial comment (2011) opines that: “the essence of democracy is for everyone to respect the wish of the majority, as expressed through the ballot”. Thou democracy originated in Athens, Greek, it has spread its tentacles across the globe. The United States of America is regarded as a beacon of democracy today.

Opata (2001) reveals that:

Democracy is said to be one of America’s greatest contribution to the contemporary world. It is based on what the people consider as workable for them, not on what a supernatural force has handed down to the people. It is based on the principle that when an elected government is no longer effective, then the people owe it as a duty to change that government, since its cash value is nothing. More importantly, power in a democratic government is said to derive from the people not from the muzzle of the gun. It is also said to be based on the rule of law, not on privileges of birth and social status. It is further claimed that it provides for freedoms of

expressions, association, religion, etc, and makes for the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (pp. 9).

Recent political development in the Arab countries of Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya where sit-tight despotic rulers were overthrown by the people through violent revolution, lay credence to the desirability of democracy as a means of furthering the collective aspirations of nations. Interestingly, as good as democracy as a form of government may sound, it has not escaped the guile of critics. Plato, the ancient philosopher in his book “the Republic” described democracy “as an expensive and idealistic form of government preferring benevolent dictatorship to rule a state because democracy is a long process and can take millions of material resources and human lives before it can engineer a society equitably. Plato’s submission is true of Nigeria’s democracy where recurrent expenditure runs into billions of naira annually due to an increasing number of political office holders who decide their remuneration not minding the conditional provision on salaries and wages. It is today, very expensive to run all the tiers of government in Nigeria. Million of Nigerians also lost their lives and property to political violence since our first democratic experience in 1960, the illegal military romance with power thereafter and the belated democratic experience of today. This sad development has prompted some international human development agencies to predict that Nigeria will soon become a “failed state”. Nigeria was ranked 22nd and 14th in 2011 amongst the countries that has the tendency of becoming a failed state (failed state index 2011) alluding to this report, Gbonigi (2011) submits that: “the crux of the matter is that the ravaging socio-economic, political, environmental, moral, religious cankerworms plaguing Nigeria today have been identified as the fundamental attributes of a failed state”.

Appadorai (1975) asserts that:

“In practice, democracy is the rule of ignorance; it pays attention to quantity, not quality. Votes are counted as something quite apart from the main business of life, in which professions and the arts, plough, sow, harvest and sell and forget that they are the governors. There is a real danger in democracy that the citizens may not be sufficiently educated to appreciate the meaning of the issues, which come before them at elections”.

Further still, Opata (2001) expressed great concern over the true nature of democracy as a people-oriented form of government. He observed that:

Huge deception is unleashed on the people that power lies with them whereas it is known with whom it lies; with a strong hegemonic class and their capitalist collaborators. The people are made to believe that they have chosen and voted for a leader whereas the leader is chosen for them by a few cabal of political manipulators.

Even in the comity of nations, powerful imperialist states hide under the banner of democracy to police and torment weaker ones thereby making jest of their sovereignty. Independent nations in a bid to arrest the interference in their domestic affairs by the so called world powers adopt their own model of democracy often referred to as “homegrown”. Nigeria practices “home grown democracy” which is often regarded as a learning process by both the leaders and the led. Moreso, section 14 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979:15-16) provides that; “the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice”. Furthermore, The National Policy on Education (1981:7) identified the following as Nigeria’s national objectives:

- a free and democratic society;
- a just and egalitarian society;
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- a great and dynamic economy;
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The declaration of “a free and democratic society” in item one (1) above as the pivot of Nigeria’s National Objective aptly suggests that democracy is a prequisite to national wellbeing and that education either formal informal or non-formal would be judiciously used as instrument to

actualizing same. The immediate need to educate the masses may have prompted Babangida (1987:19) to suggest that:

Nigeria's followership must be educated to understand and to appreciate to be morally and spiritually committed, socially awakened and fully mobilized conform in every behaviour to those principles and practices which guarantee the fulfillment of social goals.

Unfortunately, the long period of military incursion into the Nigeria politics eroded democratic values which have hardly been entrenched in our national psyche. This unfortunate development led Nigeria political and public affairs analysts to refer to our democracy as nascent. The word "nascent" according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (7th Edition) is something that is beginning to exist or not yet fully developed.

Nigeria's nascent democratic culture is predicated on the long period of military intervention in Nigerian politics. Adebisi (2011) reveals that 'the Nigerian democratic experience starting from 1999 has been an absurd theatre of errors and comedy. The fight against corruption has been reversed on itself and the electoral process produces results surpassing even the number of registered voters'.

Adewale (2003) observes that there is just a new socio-political order trying to correct the non-democratic values and practices, which have been institutionalized during the tyrannical rule (of the military). He observed the following as challenges of Nigeria's democratic re-orientation in twenty first century:

- Building up democratic institutions at the grassroots
- Involving all legitimate stakeholders to fashion out democratic values.
- Leadership training, workshops, training and sanitization programmes for all and sundry.
- Existing values and practices in learners.

The above submission calls for a vigorous political education for the Nigerian masses, significant number of which are illiterate. Political education based on sustained democratic culture for the illiterate adult populace should be intensified through non-formal education programmes. Osuji (2001) perceives political education as:

"the process through which citizens are exposed to the nature and working of the institutions of governance and are made to understand issues of politics, democracy and public and affairs and are equipped with the knowledge of their rights, duties, responsibilities and how to make their voices heard in the scheme of things. Political education is the tripod (bed rock) of participatory democracy. It arouses in the citizenry the passion and commitment to national ideals, policies and programmes. Political education is the vehicle that drives all tribes and tongues that make-up a nation towards collective national actualization".

Mhaiki (1981) reveals that:

Political adult education is necessary for democracy since democracy demands that the process of decision – making is a shared responsibility. To him, people cannot effectively exercise democratic decision-making without being politically conscious.

He further argued that: elections and voting are considered to be democratic instruments only when people are politically conscious and politically educated; otherwise elections can become occasions when the rich and powerful manipulate the masses, no matter whether the system is a one-party or multi-party government.

National adult education campaign aimed at enlightening the masses (citizens) on issues like demography (population issues) electoral law, security, health and climate change which if not addressed may infringe on individual and collective well being should be vigorously pursued. As rightly noted by Garth Forth (1980:36) without an educated electorate, democracy is impossible for it requires of its citizens alert, informed, critical interest and as far as possible, participation in the process of government.

Nnazor (2005) also observes that “adult education for personal development would provide learners guidance on how to access information regarding issues such as health, nutrition, family planning, education and career opportunities for self and children”. Adult education will enable the citizenry to embrace themselves with the complexities of emerging technologies in relation to exercise of their franchise. Until recently, nothing was known about the Direct Data Capture Machine (DDCM) which was prominently used during the April 2011 general elections in Nigeria.

Adewale (2003) notes that:

institutions are currently being established to provide leadership and citizenship education. Prominent among them is the National Orientation Agency (NOA) which is a directorate under the Ministry of Information. The Directorate of National orientation Agency is charged with the responsibility of creating greater community awareness about possibilities and participation in decision-making processes”.

In this way, adult education serves as a veritable tool in addressing the menace of illiteracy and ignorance.

Bosah (1998) opines that:

Independent voluntary adult education organizations are as a matter of urgency needed to mount evening classes, correspondences, radio, television and new print/bulletins for re-educating the Nigerian populace. Such efforts cannot be run on commercial basis but as a charitable gesture by concerned wealthy Nigerians and non-governmental organizations. This is so because the average Nigerian worker cannot afford and no longer reads newspapers, the poor reading culture in Nigeria notwithstanding.

Aremu (2001) observes that: “Cuba has the lowest HIV/AIDS prevalent rate due to education and non-marketization of the battle against the scourge”. For any voluntary effort to succeed, the Nigerian, government through the leaders must provide the enabling environment through their political will. As noted by Adeniyi and Abdul-Rasheed (2005); “anybody selected or elected as a leader must be GOD conscious and must be faithful to the electorates. He must see to the welfare of his subjects, protect their rights and guarantee the safety of their lives and property”. Adult-education is required to educate the adults who will in turn educate their children. In an ill-informed society, illiterate parent are quick to allow their children become ready tools in the hands of desperate politicians to unleash mayhem on the system as political thugs. As noted by Utomi (2011) the orgy of election violence has been democratized...it has also been given federal character. There were also celebrated cases of under-aged voting, ballots box snatching, voter intimidation, ballot box stuffing, bribing of electoral officers, bomb planting, voter apathy and voter fatigue. The guardian editorial comment Thursday, April, 21, 2011 noted that: “as much as 1, 259, 506 votes were voided out of total of 39,469,484 cast. It called on both INEC and the parties to enlighten voters on the need to ensure the relevance of their votes. Illiteracy and disregard for human life has also thrown up the “Boko Haram”, a militant religious sect which literary means “western education is evil”. The group has claimed responsibility to the sporadic bombings that has engulfed the nation in recent times. Even the United Nations (UN) building in Abuja was blown up on Friday, the 26th of August. 2011. Moreso, in Nigeria where multi-party system is practiced, the electorate would have to go through a long list of candidates on the ballot paper before deciding on whom to vote for. There is also need to educate the illiterates on the meaning of the logo and slogans of the different political parties and the philosophy they represent. Before the April 2011 general elections, Nigeria had over 65 registered political parties, there is need to understand what each acronym of a party represents, where their state and national secretariat is situated and the name of their Chairmen and officers.

Adult education will enlighten the electorates on the provisions of the 2010 electoral act as amended. Women education is required to elicit women’s interest in partisan politics and gender emancipation. The 35% affirmative action of the PDP government for women in Nigerian politics is a welcome development. Some political parties now exempt women from paying for nomination forms should they decide to contest any elective position.

Also, women education will go along way in empowering the women economically in order to contribute to the upkeep of their families and to stand up against gender discrimination, educational disparity in favour of the boy child to the detriment of the girl-child. It is expedient therefore to combine the principles of democracy and andragogy towards overall national development. The time is now!

Political adult education should be carried out in our communities through the use of local languages of our various communities.

Each educated adult should be encouraged to teach the uneducated one. Indigenes who engage themselves into political thurgries should be made public and brought to book and punished according to the laws of our country. This will serve as a deterrent to others who may wished to be future political thurgs. Political conscientization of the adults is urgently needed.

The three tiers of government (Federal, State and Local) should recognize the fact that adult education serves as a driving force for political consciousness. They should with a very high zeal, fund and monitor adult education programmes.

Governments should work in partnership with communities where these adults live.

Conclusion

This study emphasized adult education as a tool for nurturing Nigeria's nascent democracy. Adult education, democracy, characteristics of the adult and forms of adult education were discussed.

Finally the study using adult education as a tool for nurturing Nigeria's nascent democracy is inevitable especially now that our democracy is described as "nascent".

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